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ABSTRACT

Script theory suggests that human memory is organized around personal experiences or episodes rather than around semantic categories, and that a particular event is remembered as it relates to other events occurring simultaneously. According to the experience of one teacher of business German on the college level, students of business German need to develop scripts on German-speaking people that are more complete than the partial scripts they have already developed in their previous study. Business German students include future managers and small business owners or employees, who need to develop cultural sensitivity. Films shown in class can be used to heighten awareness of cultural similarities and differences and to complement, supplement, or supplant textbook study. While full-length features are too long and too narrow in scope to be useful, documentaries are varied and can provide information on people, buildings, history, technical processes, and travel and geography. Suitable documentaries are available from the German consulate and public and college libraries. Pre-viewing questions on business subjects relevant to the film can be provided to heighten student perceptions and appreciation of film content, and critiques, in German and on business topics, can be assigned after film viewing. (MSE)

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# CULTURAL SIMULATION:

# ADAPTATION OF FILMS FOR BUSINESS GERMAN

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# CULTURAL SIMULATION: ADAPTATION OF FILMS FOR BUSINESS GERMAN

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Last year in early March a student came to class - Business German I - and said almost accusingly: "You didn't tell me that Germany was so grey and cold this time of the year!" I swallowed the answer, "you should have asked me" and instead inquired: "What did you expect?" The young man, one of the very bright and aware members of USC's Entrepreneur program, had left me a note saying he had to accompany someone on a business trip to Baden-Wurttemberg. Great! We had just talked about this region in detail, including the weather. This student had demonstrated on a quiz that he had absorbed the information, could answer questions and also report on the subject.

Why then did he not expect "grey" and "cold"?

His answer to my question surprised me: "When I took German in high school we saw all those movies . . ."
Perhaps the reader remembers some of those documentaries = Kulturfilme, which were shown to give language learning relevance, whet the appetite for foreign travel and keep language students interested in grammar and vocabulary.
During the class period we reviewed the information on climate and geography in light of these personalized findings. Other students contributed to the discussion by recollecting feature films and stories about visits to Germany when it was cold and

rainy. This paper is not about the weather of course, but all the films I have ever seen, especially documentaries, show Germany with almost mediterranean skies. The only rainy day I remember distinctly in such a film showed visitors to East Berlin with umbrellas. There it was raining.

This episode with the student puzzled me. It had to do with memory which had somehow influenced his expectations. Literary criticism has a term "horizon of expectations", the Erwartungshorizont. This wasn't literature, this fitted more into linguistics. Modern linguistics has an approach -- Script Theory, created less than 10 years ago. It can be included under Pragmatics, a science concerned with the influence of extra-linguistic factors in the production and interpretation of meaning in verbal communication. It investigates how context is used by speakers to assign meaning to what is said, or, in other words, analyze the context and use the results for their interaction.[1] Script Theory is an attempt to address this issue.

Script Theory apparently developed as a "byproduct" of memory studies for computers where the question was: "How much text is required to retrieve something from computer memory?" It posits a mental frame or script, or perhaps a story board which is the knowledge base that gives meaning to language. An occurrence is interpretated in light of previous experience leading to assumptions to what one can expect, what will happen, and how it will happen.

Roger C.Schank and Robert P. Abelson of Yale University use the term "knowledge structures". Their 1977 book Scripts, Plans, Goals and Understanding"[2] is a fascinating analysis of these "knowledge structures", that provide a person with assumptions and expectations regarding situations which that person can use when placed in similar situations. Surroundings or events seem very familiar. They believe that human memory is organized around personal experiences or episodes rather than around semantic categories[3], implying that humans do not remember in semantically related "lists" but rather in terms of episodes or events in their life.

Script Theory also suggests that a specific event is remembered as it relates to other events which occur simultaneously. The terminus used here is "episodic memory". The theory of episodic memory is the underlying principle of the theory of scripts.

If this is the case, then the mention of one part of this script should recall other parts. Those events which are similar should therefore be stored as generalized episodes with a common denominator which is the script. Similar scripts should be produced as one's experience increases. Those could result in the development of elaborate scripts with sub-branches.
Following this line of reasoning we would expect to find notions on every script of what verbal and non-verbal behavior occurs in slightly varying situations such as visiting foreign countries.

for instance. American students, while visiting Western European countries perhaps, see the same jeans, the same McDonald's hamburger on someone's plate might expect similar responses as at home, yet the people encountered can react differently because they come from different cultures with different preferences, in other words, with different scripts.

Likewise, a Swiss or Austrian in a three-piece suit fresh from Europe may look like someone from West-Germany, especially if his accent is distinctly German, but there is still the different cultural background which needs to be considered. The American businessman may need modifications in his script that will include data on all German speaking countries.

The student mentioned earlier seemed to have developed a partial script regarding Germany from visual images contained in the films he had seen. He must have received textual information during his years studying the language just as he absorbed facts during the first six weeks of Business German I. Was the visual and the semantic input perhaps stored side by side without integration? If so, then any learned facts about the German culture might not be considered or applied while surrounded by that culture. This issue needs to be addressed.

I believe a major concern of Business German I should be to bring the "other" culture closer to the students. To help the students develop cultural sensitivity, "cultural literacy", is my main interest, since many of them will be involved in global trade.

The target groups of most business language classes are two-fold: There are future managers, who will have bi-lingual secretaries and international lawyers; Varner/Whitcomb in their article, " Interdisciplinary Co-operation and the Illinois State Model" describe a program designed for this group where "very few of the students . . . will actually spend their lives writing business letters to Germany."[4] This program features a wide range of topics on culture, personal habits and preferences, historical and political background, besides straight business information.

The other group consists of future owners or employees of small firms, cottage industries perhaps, or of distributors of articles produced by such firms. They will conduct their own correspondence, and will need emphasis on vocabulary development and letter writing. Many business language programs are directed towards acquiring these skills. But even they may not need those skills. A paper read by Dr.Grandin[5] demonstrated business letter writing with the help of a computer.

Both groups, however, share the need to develop cultural sensitivity. Edward T. Hall believes there "is no way to <u>teach</u> culture the same way that language is taught."[6] and "that the real job is not to understand foreign culture but to understand our own."[7] This would suggest the need to demonstrate the differences in the foreign culture by heightening awareness of one's own culture. The question occurred to me: What would the

Peace corps tell their volunteers; what would the CIA tell their personnel to heighten awareness?

What do most people from German speaking nations look like? Students or business men look very much like their counterparts in the U.S. But here, looks can be deceiving, and more important, costly if one uses a distinctly American approach to doing business.[8] Teaching the language of the target country should go far beyond proper grammar and vocabulary usage, because doing business in or with a foreign country depends on communication, and communication is more than using proper terminology. What do German speaking countries look like? Similar to many places in the U.S., even the automobiles are a mixture of American, Japanese and European styles.

With respect to Business German, what should the expectations be for such countries as Austria, the Federal Republic, the German Democratic Republic and Switzerland all sharing the same written language? Their respective cultures are what makes them unique.

How can films shown in a business language class heighten the awareness of similarities and differences between the American and European scene? They can provide portions of a script. The partial but more realistic script the American student needs to develop should contain visual images which trigger certain responses. The impressions gleaned from a film can complement, supplement or even supplant book-learning.

Why use films rather than slides?

It is a personal preference. I find slides static and films dynamic. I feel films simulate a living environment.

A student or business man arriving in another country will be surrounded by moving objects - people, cars, trains -. Possible details of such first encounters will add to an existing script. They can be a point of departure, perhaps even the enactment of a script.

The Types of Films: Available are full-lenth features and documentaries.

Full-length features have limited suitability. They are too long, too narrowly defined for a first overview. The environment is usually selected to suit the story line.

In documentaries, especially those designed for prospective travelers, one can expect an overview of many regions. Ideally it should happen that one can later, when visiting, recognize places one has seen on film. Some documentaries focus on famous people (scientists, poets, artists), buildings (Cologne Cathedral); or period (Baroque). Others feature technical processes: e.g. all about plastics; car production; North Sea oil; etc.

Among the travelogs one can distinguish between "landscape" and "people" themes. Landscape-oriented are those showing the Rhine river, for instance, or Rothenburg. They are of great advantage because they usually cover a lot of ground and can give a good

overview of an area/region; can identify a region as to usage e.g. agricultural or industrial. Topics connected with means of transportation are suitable after viewing such films. The discussion can also start with observations on topography e.g. roads, rivers, seasonal characteristics with the accompanying question: where would one expect to find industry? tourism? agriculture?

The other group of documentaries focusing on people will show cities and/or landscapes as seen through the eyes of tourists, who might appear as part of the film. Often included are people of different age groups, genders, professions, students, workers, children and their respective places of action.
Most films are of mixed categories with emphasis on either landscape or people.

Where to get such films: The script of USC's German Department had to be changed recently when the source of films shifted from the Consulate in Los Angeles to a central office in Florida with regional distribution centers. The films are provided free of charge. Catalogs are sent which contain short notations about the content of the films. Previewing is necessary since there is no reference to suitability for Business German. Other sources are public and college/university libraries.

When I first introduced films, lack of time and late arrivals did not always allow for previewing. But I found it was possible to

see all films through the eyes of a business man. The importance for an instructor, of course, is to insist that the specific film was selected with business topics in mind.

In the beginning the discussions were fascinating but altogether hit and miss until I had the students focus on one item at a time. Since students had partial scripts due to their language studies, I attempted a modification. In other words, call up the existing script and modify it by programming it with an additional set of expectations.

As homework I assigned one-page critiques in German which focused on one business aspect. The films were shown in complementary pairs, a short technically oriented filmstrip along with a slightly longer travelog. Most were 10-15 minutes long, none longer than 30 minutes.

Many students had seen tourist films before, but with a business point of view in mind they saw even those films and the landscapes shown in a new light. They learned, for instance, to appreciate tourism as a booming industry.

I would like to cite three examples to illustrate the topic:

My most challenging experience was with a film entitled <u>The Metamorphosis of a Street in Bremen</u>, described in the catalog as a street of craftsmen and artists. It turned out to be an expose

on modern art. The street was completely levelled in WW II, and then rebuilt. This lead to an interesting discussion about investments, small shops, probably with single proprietorship, and the importance of "Strassencafes" among the shops and art galleries. The mention of "Strassencafe" can lend itself for discussions about the Germans' use of space; that it is culturally acceptable to sit down at a partially occupied table; how close to each other people stand while talking, and that people shake hands as greeting.[9]

The film Americans in Berlin offered important information for prospective entrepreneurs. Besides giving general impressions of the city, including the Wall and East-Berlin, the film stressed that the military presence of Americans in Berlin not only safeguarded the population but also American investments. The latter point was brought out through interviews with local shopkeepers. As a result of this film, one of the students actually wrote to the Chamber of Commerce in Berlin for information, on how to set up a franchise for the distribution of flower bouquets decorated with balloons. His brother has a trademark on this.

The series Technology Today is in English and offers glimpses of technical developments in Germany. Films in this series also broadened the students' general knowledge of industry and production, an important aspect, since most students have never been near a factory, for instance.

It is necessary to prepare the students for the visual application through a set of questions which will help to develop a personal reference point by giving them a kind of pre-viewing questionaire.

First step: Identify and isolate available knowledge - call up the script. If a script is already present it needs to be checked for accuracy and may be modified by adding or subtracting information. Perhaps as homework or at the beginning of class each student collects points concerning geographical environment, people, and businesses of his/her respective home town or college town. If a student came from a small town into a large city or vice versa, asking about that experience = calling up that script, can be a productive intermittent step to heighten awareness of experiences and expectations.

I divided the material into 3 categories: Environment, Supply and Demand.

ENVIRONMENTAL questions, for instance, are on topography, appearance of cities, towns, rivers, canals.

Under SUPPLY fall questions about production and services.

Under DEMAND fall questions concerning human requirements like food, shelter, work, entertainment and health care.

How specific the questions are is dependent on the students' prior knowledge.

Some questions to promote thought and discussions are as follows:

Sample previewing questions for the film Port of Hamburg[10] can be assigned as homework):

Do the students know of a river-canal system in the U.S.? (e.g. part of the St. Lawrence Sea Way).

What is the purpose of such a system? (e.g. connecting rivers, bypassing Niagara Falls).

Who/what uses waterways? (e.g. barges - transporting bulk goods).

Where is the American shipbuilding industry located? (e.g. Seattle etc.).

After viewing the film questions can be asked on different levels:

Environmental questions: Location of Hamburg? (Northern Germany near North Sea; Baltic Sea). Find regional waterways! (Elbe; Nord-Ostseekanal; Elbe-Lubeck-Kanal; Elbe-Seitenkanal = connections to the Mittellandkanal).

Supply-side questions: What are the two main tasks of the Hamburger Hafen? (Transfer of goods; shipbuilding)

This could be a point of departure for an in-depth discussion of production, types of companies, e.g. AG, GMBH.

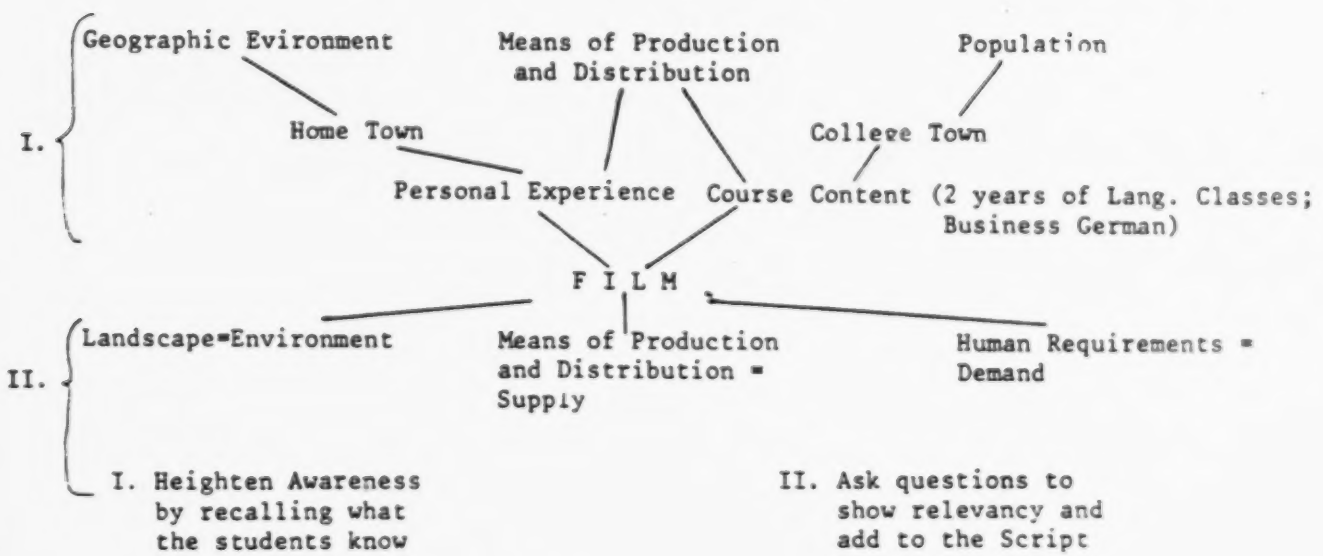
Demand-side questions: What happens if there is no demand for ships? (Unemployment)

An in-depth discussion of the labor market, social services and the like could follow.

What are the expectations based on this approach - heightening awareness through showing films? What can viewing films and asking questions actually do for the students?

The students will connect factual knowledge with pictures. Upon entering the foreign culture they will recognize similar environments, and similarities to the culture they were initially exposed to. They will be looking for correspondences. The instructor's task is to add information which will assist students to beware of differences. In other words - in the terminology of Script Theory - the students will have assumptions and expectations of the environment and the culture, leading to awareness of possible sequence and content of verbal and non-verbal behavior both of which are inextricably tied to the culture of a people.

ASSOCIOGRAMM [11]


I.
Geographic Evironment
Means of Production and Distribution
Population
Home Town
College Town
Personal Experience
Course Content (2 years of Lang. Classes; Business German)
F I L M
II.
Landscape=Environment
Means of Production and Distribution = Supply
Human Requirements = Demand
I. Heighten Awareness by recalling what the students know
II. Ask questions to show relevancy and add to the Script

NOTES

1 Jurgen Streek, "Embodied Context, Transcontextuals, and the Timing of Speech Acts," in Journal of Pragmatics, 8 (1984), 119-137.

2 Roger C.Schank and Robert P. Abelson, Script, Plans, Goals, and Understanding, (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publisher, 1977) p. 17.

3 Ibid., p. 18.

4 Carson H. Varner, Jr. & Richard O. Whitcomb, "Interdisciplinary Co operation and the Illinois State Model," in Teaching Business and Technical German: Problems and Prospects, ed. Kathryn Buck et al., (New York: The Carl Duisberg Society, Inc., 1981), p. 45.

5 John M. Grandin, "You Too Can Write German Business Letters (With a Little Help From a Computer)," paper read at the EMU Conference on Foreign Languages for Business and the Professions, (Dearborn, MI: May 2-4, 1985).

6 Edward T. Hall, The Silent Language, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959), p. 48.

7 Ibid., p. 53.

8 Edward T. Hall, Beyond Culture, (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976), p. 35, 119.

9 Edward T. Hall, The Hidden Dimensions, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966), p. 136-136.

10 Film Port of Hamburg (Hamburger Hafen)# 16922 German Film Service, Modern Talking Picture Service, 5000 Park Street North, St. Petersburg, FL 33709), 15 Minutes.

[11] see Jack Moeller, Helmut Liedloff, and Helen Lepke, Kaleidoscope, Kultur, Literatur und Grammatik, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983), p. IAE 8.

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